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ABSTRACT

The 11 publications reviewed in this annotated bibliography were selected from the ERIC database as significant and useful information about aspects of the school environment--the instructional climate--that lead to school effectiveness. Among the topics discussed are teacher expectations, staff morale, student input, self-discipline, and leadership qualities. Two entries concern understanding the school culture, and another two offer systematic procedures for improving the school climate. A three-part school environment handbook takes the reader through the processes involved in environmental improvement. A paper from a computer conference explores how microcomputers can have a strong effect on instructional climate. (MLF)

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THE BEST OF ERIC

ON EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Number 75, May 1984

The Best of ERIC presents annotations of ERIC literature on important topics in educational management.

The selections are intended to give educators easy access to the most significant and useful information available from ERIC. Because of space limitations, the items listed should be viewed as representative, rather than exhaustive, of literature meeting those criteria.

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Instructional Climate for Success

1 **Arganbright, Jerry L.** "Teacher Expectations—A Critical Factor for Student Achievement." *NASSP Bulletin*, 67, 464 (September 1983), pp. 93-95. EJ 286 642.

Expectations strongly influence human behavior. This fact is not lost on Arganbright, who here convincingly argues that teacher expectations are a prime factor in determining both the instructional climate of a school and student achievement.

Teachers develop their expectations of students from a variety of sources: from a student's older siblings, permanent school records, other teachers, knowledge of a student's socioeconomic class, and familiarity with a student's peer group. In practice, these expectations often become the basis for grouping students into different ability levels.

Arganbright points out the extensive documentation showing that grouping students by perceived ability does more harm than good. Any advantage gained by streamlining and/or specializing the curriculum for certain ability students is more than offset by the reinforcement of teachers' low expectations for "low ability" students.

Many effective schools with healthy instructional climates still utilize some forms of ability grouping. But the teachers in effective schools also "have adopted an instructional orientation that reflects this belief." The challenge for the administrator, Arganbright concludes, "is to be a catalyst in creating and maintaining this belief and injecting it into the school's curriculum."

2 **Bebermeyer, Ruth.** *Leadership for School Climate Improvement. A Working Paper Prepared for the Urban Education Network*. St. Louis: CEMREL, Inc., March 1982. 130 pages. ED 221 949.

How does leadership affect school climate? Should it, in fact, influence school climate? What exactly are school climate and leadership, and how do they interact? Bebermeyer does a very thorough job of bringing up the relevant questions concerning leadership and school climate and then answers them with clear explanations drawn from a variety of sources.

The author begins by clearly differentiating leaders from administrators: Administrators use existing ways to reach goals while leaders create new ways when needed. She presents several experts' lists of abilities and factors crucial to effective leadership for climate improvement. All lists invariably include such factors as: takes initiative, is considerate, communicates well, and has high expectations.

The author then examines school climate, again noting several experts' definitions and listing indicators of a good school climate, including: teachers believing they can teach the subject to the students, students believing they can learn, students being treated equally and not grouped by ability, and the presence of strong leadership from the administration.

Next, Bebermeyer outlines a systematic procedure for improving school climate. Activities explained include administering questionnaires, analyzing and interpreting results, developing a plan, implementing the plan, and evaluating results. Fourteen different indices for assessing school climate are included, along with some staff-developed, research-based assessment materials.

Bebermeyer discusses several programs that nonprofit organizations, states, school districts, and other educational organizations have used to help school leaders develop skills in communication, decision-making, and conflict-resolution. She also provides a detailed reference list and an excellent nine-page summary outline of the important points of her paper for easy reference.

Bebermeyer has done an outstanding job of synthesizing the relevant data on the relationships between leadership and school climate. She writes in a clean, precise, engaging manner that makes this paper a high priority for any school leader who wants to improve instructional climate.

3 **Brookover, Wilbur, and others.** *Creating Effective Schools: An In-Service Program for Enhancing School Climate and Achievement.* Holmes Beach, Florida: Learning Publications, 1982. 290 pages. ED 229 457.

Wilbur Brookover and his colleagues have been studying the relationship between school learning climate and student achievement for many years. This excellent book brings together some of their best material to date. It provides a comprehensive outline for a schoolwide climate improvement project, consisting of preliminary meetings and eleven learning modules.

The authors stress that the individual modules not be used separately. "The entire program must be used as a whole for maximum benefits. Using only certain modules ignores the fact that the different aspects of the school learning climate are interconnected and affect the other parts." In addition, because school climate reflects the collective norms and behaviors of all school commu-

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nity members, the entire staff should be involved in the training.

In the introduction, detailed suggestions are presented for setting up and implementing the inservice program. Included are recommendations for assessing the current state of the school's climate, developing a formal working agreement between the principal and teachers, and setting up a "building leadership team."

The individual modules—each twenty to thirty pages in length—cover such topics as effective climate, expectations for learning, organizational roles, grouping and differentiation, effective instruction, academic learning time, classroom management, student team learning, reinforcing achievement, using assessment data for school improvement, and involving parents in the school improvement effort. Several suggested activities, necessary forms and checklists, and references to additional resources are included in each module.

4 **Deal, Terrence E., and Kennedy, Allan A.** "Culture and School Performance." *Educational Leadership*, 40, 5 (February 1983), pp. 14-15. EJ 276 371.

"Building strong school cultures is intimately tied to improving educational performance," state Deal and Kennedy. But what exactly is school culture? Why is it so powerful? And what can educational leaders do to build strong cultures in their schools?

In practical terms, "culture is an informal understanding of the 'way we do things around here'." The "soul" of a school culture is the set of values, beliefs, norms, and expectations shared by most school community members. Culture is reflected by the heroes and heroines of a school, by its rituals and ceremonies, and by "an informal network of priests and priestesses, storytellers, spies, and gossips."

A strong school culture with norms and values centered on educational productivity is like an organizational "glue": it provides "the internal cohesion that makes it easier for teachers to teach; students to learn; and for parents, administrators, and others to contribute to the instructional process." Schools without such strong cultures have their unity splintered by subcultures and parochial interests that pull the school in several directions at once.

Administrators wanting to improve their school's productivity should first gain an understanding of the school's culture and how it encourages or undermines educational performance. Deal and Kennedy provide many suggestions for this process, including examining the metaphors used in everyday conversation, noting how people spend their time and what they pay attention to, and examining the roles of various school community members. Once the culture has been mapped, principals can start altering it with such actions as "reflecting desired values in everyday speech and behavior," "anointing heroes and heroines among teachers, students, and parents who exemplify these values," and telling stories about the school that reflect desirable cultural values.

5 **Dumaresq, Richard, and Blust, Ross.** *School Climate Improvement: A Model for Effective School Change*. July 1981. 22 pages. ED 209 404.

Research has shown that as school climate becomes more positive, attendance and academic achievement improve while discipline problems, vandalism, and violence decline. How, though, can something as pervasive and intangible as school climate be changed for the better? One promising approach, as outlined in this paper, is to use the methodologies of "organizational development" to modify those structures, procedures, rules, attitudes, and relationships within a school that ultimately determine the school's climate.

The climate improvement process described here involves an intervention by a "client system." "Entry" into a school system starts with preliminary discussions at the central office and building site levels followed by faculty votes in individual schools to decide whether to proceed with the change effort. The authors recommend a two-thirds majority of teacher support in a school before implementation proceeds. "The process can only succeed with the support and agreement of the people who will do the ultimate work—the faculty." In addition, "to initiate a climate improvement process by authoritarian, administrative fiat would run counter to the goal of improved climate through shared decision making."

The next step is to conduct a thorough "organizational diagnosis" using interviews, observations, and formal surveys to determine the current problems, needs, goals, and political and economic realities of the school. The authors describe several diagnostic instruments that may be useful for this process.

A comprehensive staff development program, designed for both administrators and faculty, should follow diagnosis. This program must focus on the key factors determining school climate—organizational goals, rewards, support systems, and decision-making arrangements—if effective school climate improvement is to take place. The final stages of the improvement effort, which the authors discuss at length, include action planning for the change process, implementing the plan, evaluating its effectiveness, and institutionalizing the positive changes produced.

6 **ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.** *The Culture of an Effective School*. Research Action Brief, number 22. Eugene, Oregon: ERIC/CEM, 1983. 4 pages. ED number not yet assigned.

Numerous studies of school effectiveness have attempted to identify the individual administrative, financial, and instructional factors that account for school success. Many such factors have been identified, but these bits and pieces of research evidence have not, as a whole, produced a cohesive theory of school effectiveness.

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In recent years, though, some educational researchers have been examining the effects of "school climate" on student achievement. The comprehensive theory of school effectiveness emerging from this research "proposes that a school's success is determined in large part by the underlying structure of norms, expectations, and beliefs in the school." This review examines research on the traits of effective schools, explores the links between these traits and a school's culture, and suggests ways practitioners can improve their schools by manipulating the "norm-behavior cycle" at work in every school.

Three major traits of effective schools are closely related to the mechanisms determining a school's climate. First, effective schools have strong systems of goals and expectations geared to academic excellence. These goals and expectations are clearly communicated, strongly emphasized, and applied equally to all students in the school.

Second, effective schools maintain a secure, orderly, and nondisruptive environment. Third, effective schools have principals who are strong instructional leaders. They spend a great deal of time out in the hallways and classrooms, closely involved in the "web" of norms and behaviors.

Principals can change their schools' instructional climates by first understanding the norm-behavior cycle that determines school climate and then manipulating that cycle through the careful and sustained application of "organizational development" and classical behavior modification methods.

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7 **Gillespie, Judith, and others.** *School Environment Handbook. Part I: Overview and Workshop Activities. Part II: Environmental Awareness and Assessment of the School Environment. Part III: Planning Environmental Change.* Indianapolis: Indiana State Department of Public Instruction, 1979. 33, 38, and 36 pages. ED 213 667-669.

The social mechanisms that create a school's instructional environment are tightly interwoven processes that often "feed back" on themselves in complex ways. Not surprisingly, administrators often draw a blank when trying to decide just how to go about improving their school's climate.

The authors of this three-part handbook provide some much-needed help by taking the reader through the maze of processes involved in environmental improvement. Part I begins by listing a series of underlying assumptions that the authors work from, including their view of the cafeteria as the hub of the school, and their conception of climate generation as a chain of Rube Goldberg-like influences—for example, school and cafeteria environments influencing one another while influencing attitudes and behavior (such as self-esteem and efficacy), which in turn influence habits, which then feed back to either reinforce the current climate or forge a new one.

Part II focuses on the first two steps of the improvement process—environmental awareness and assessment. The authors provide a variety of inventories, profiles and surveys for building environmental awareness, which are to be completed by everyone involved in the decision-making process, including administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, and students. In the second step, participants complete a series of environmental assessments to determine the values each holds toward self, school setting, and the school in general.

Part III focuses on the planning and evaluation of changes. The authors include short practical examples of schools that have used their process and the positive results that have been obtained. Four main activities are highlighted: planning, goal setting, carrying out goals, and evaluation or information sharing. The text comes replete with instruments that can be used as is or can be modified to fit any school's needs.

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8 **Miller, William C.** "Staff Morale, School Climate, and Educational Productivity." *Educational Leadership*, 38, 6 (March 1981), pp. 483-486. EJ 243 839.

Numerous research studies have found that both school climate and staff morale are closely correlated with student attitudes and achievement. Miller here discusses the findings of some of these studies, describes the characteristics of productive school environments, and outlines actions that building administrators can take to improve school climate.

School climate can range from "closed" to "open." "A closed climate is characterized by a confining, concealing, restricting atmosphere" where the staff is often apathetic and where the main concern "is that students complete tasks in an orderly and quiet manner." In an open climate, teachers are accepting and honest and show "a balance in concern for task achievement and social needs satisfaction."

Building administrators play an important role in determining the quality of a school's climate and can help engender a healthy climate in numerous ways. For example, they can increase their credibility as instructional leaders by visiting classrooms frequently, talking with students in the hallways and classrooms, showing interest in new ideas, and being accessible most of the day to both teachers and students. They can model the behaviors they wish teachers and students to develop, delegate authority as often as possible, and support creative teaching ideas. Finally, they can be "face-to-face oriented" by delivering messages personally, holding conferences with teachers in their own classrooms, giving positive feedback, and spending lunch hours in the teachers' lounge.

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9 **Olds, Henry F., Jr.** "The Microcomputer—An Environment That Teaches: Exploring the Hidden Curriculum." 13 pages. In *The Computer: Extension of the Human Mind,* Proceedings of the Third Annual Summer Conference, College of Education, University of Oregon. Eugene, Oregon: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1982. 236 pages. ED 219 859.

Microcomputers are rapidly gaining use as interactive, audiovisual teaching aids. Most educators see the new micros as influencing the "formal" aspects of the curriculum—computers will teach more in less time, provide individualized instruction, keep better records on student progress, free the teacher for more complex teaching tasks, and so forth. But the most profound effect of microcomputers on education, Olds suggests, will be on the "informal" or "hidden" curriculum—that complex of norms and behaviors that makes up the instructional climate of a school.

Microcomputers can potentially have a strong effect on instructional climate for two reasons. First, they will soon be pervasive teaching aids; whatever influence they have will be felt throughout the school organizations. Second, they will be an integral part of many instructional situations and will communicate not only the facts and ideas they are programmed to deliver, but a set of assumptions and unspoken ideas that even the designers of the programs may not be fully aware of.

So the instructional programs that run on microcomputers teach "values" whether they are explicitly attempting to do so or not. For example, traditional instructional programs present information, ask questions, evaluate responses, and so forth in a relatively straightforward manner. On lower levels, says Olds, this approach teaches that "the computer is both necessary and sufficient for learning," "places the user in a submissive and tightly constrained role," and eliminates normal interhuman dialogue.

But micros needn't be used in this manner. Programs exist that make micros behave as "simulators" or "tool chests." The com-

puter becomes a facilitator or tool for interactive learning with other humans, instead of a master controller of the instructional process. Students using such programs learn a very different set of instructional values, for example, that learning is not simply a matter of adapting one's thinking to that of another, that learning is an essentially human activity, and that it is safe to make errors.

10 **Washburn, J. Michael, and Hammond, Janice M.** "Student Leadership Camp for Improving School Climate." *Educational Leadership,* 39, 7 (April 1982), pp. 518-520. EJ 261 557.

At times a school district must teeter on the brink of collapse before constructive change takes place. Such was the case in the Garden City (Michigan) school district, which experienced a 48 percent drop in enrollment in twelve years, a forty-two day teacher strike, the jailing of eleven of its teachers, and a severe budget crisis. School climate in Garden City reached an all-time low. Students, teachers, and community members alike were all dissatisfied and demoralized.

A newly appointed superintendent worked with educators and community leaders to raise revenues for some serious revitalizing efforts. They knew that the first major need was to "reawaken school pride and spirit" and that the best way to do so was to involve students in the decision-making process from the ground up.

To achieve effective student input, the district administrators wisely focused the next phase of their revitalization plan on communication. They chose a variety of formal and informal student leaders from their schools and went with them to student leadership camp. There, they got to know each other and learned how to work together by participating in a number of coordinated communication activities. They learned good listening habits, the "value of eye contact," the importance of proximity, and other invaluable communication skills.

As a result of the camps, the schools implemented committees to allow student input on school decisions at every level. The student leaders initiated school spirit activities and teacher and community awards. They were involved in the establishment of new student behavior policies, and as a result generated a large amount of student body support for the new policies.

Through improved communication channels the administrators, teachers, and students were able to revitalize the instructional climate of the school, rebuild where once there was debris, and maximize the potential of the community's greatest resource—its youth.

11 **Wayson, William W., and Lasley, Thomas J.** "Climates for Excellence: Schools That Foster Self-Discipline." *Phi Delta Kappan,* 65, 6 (February 1984), pp. 419-421. EJ number not yet assigned.

"Schools with well-disciplined students have developed a sense of community, marked by mutually agreed-upon behavioral norms," state Wayson and Lasley. "These norms surround students with examples of acceptable behaviors and provide the subtle rewards and sanctions that encourage students to behave appropriately." Moreoever, these often unspoken norms are much more powerful in determining behavior than formal rules and punishments.

This is one of the conclusions reached by a study of effective school discipline programs conducted by the Phi Delta Kappan Commission on Discipline. Wayson and Lasley here describe five factors the study found necessary "to create an environment that encourages teachers and students to feel good about themselves and to develop and maintain a culture conducive to learning."

First, students must be made to feel that they "belong" to the school and that the school, in turn, "belongs" to them. These feelings of belongingness and ownership can be fostered by involving as many students as possible in school programs and governance and by giving students responsibility for participation in school affairs.

Second, the school should have a strong core of "superordinate goals" that are developed and maintained through either formal or informal processes by administrators, teachers, and students. Third, symbols of identity and excellence in the school should be developed and maintained. School slogans, for example, can be used to reinforce and disseminate "values that exemplify what is expected of all members of the culture."

Fourth, school leaders and "heroes" should be fostered. "Heroes are value shapers" because they are seen as exemplifying desirable behaviors and values. Principals are often seen as "visionary heroes" while students are more often cast in the role of "situational heroes." Finally, clear formal and informal rules for expected behavior should be collectively developed.

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College of Education
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon 97403